

Out in the Cold

Soldiers transition physical training to winter weather

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During regular morning physical training sessions in the summer months, the noncommissioned officers had to be on the lookout for heat injuries and monitor their Soldier's exposure to sun.

Soon fall blows in bringing cooler, more tolerable temperatures to work in and winter isn't far behind.

"Training NCOs should start transitioning their Soldiers into winter late November to early December," said 1st Lt. Nushat Thomas, Womack Army Medical Center, Department of Preventive Medicine. "Especially when temperatures start dropping below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. They should maintain the same buddy system they used all summer long in the winter to identify cold injuries."

Thomas said NCOs should teach their Soldiers to look out for the following symptoms during their PT sessions or when working outdoors in colder temperatures:

- **Chillblains** (Frost Nip) — a local reaction from windy, damp, cold conditions in temperatures between 32 to 55 degrees. Areas affected are any exposed skin and extremities. The affected area will be tender, red, swollen and

itchy. The person with frost nip will also feel prickly sensations and numbness in the exposed areas. Treatment for this injury is to remove the person from the cold environment and warm them up.

- **Hypothermia** — a condition that involves the whole body cooling and core temperatures falling below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Thomas said the early signs of hypothermia are difficult to recognize but when a person's mental status changes and their vigorous shivering stops, it's important to seek immediate medical attention, as hypothermia may be fatal.

"There will be a slowing of the heart rate, breathing. It will be similar to a heat injury, once you have hypothermia and you are no longer shivering. Seek immediate medical attention," Thomas explained and added, "they shouldn't conduct their training outside for more than three hours in temperatures below 30 degrees. They should also look out for any superficial and second degree frostbites, which can also occur in temperatures less than 32 degrees."

Thomas suggests that NCOs should plan for threat of injuries.

"Basically use the risk management system by identifying the threat," Thomas said and suggests using a plan for

threat found in field and also monitor the weather by using a wind chill chart. "Keep them hydrated and then there is an acronym COLDER they can use."

She said the acronym COLDER stands for:

- **C** — keep clothing clean
- **O** — avoid overheating
- **L** — wear loose layered clothing
- **D** — keep clothing dry
- **E** — examine clothing for any holes, tears and broken fasteners
- **R** — repair or replace damaged clothing

Thomas also provided the following tips for NCOs to bear in mind to keep their Soldiers safe during winter PT.

- Ensure they are wearing the appropriate uniform.
- Make sure Soldiers wear the correct protection for their feet.
- Allow proper time for new Soldiers to acclimate to the environment.
- Increase physical activity commensurate with the Soldiers physical level.
- Use warming measures.
- Avoid wind exposure.
- Make sure the Soldiers consume

warm foods and liquids.

- Keep Soldiers hydrated and educate them on the impact of alcohol use on the body's hydration.

- Enforce proper nutrition.

- Watch out for Soldiers who have had past cold injuries as they are more prone to future cold injuries.

- Acutely ill Soldiers (i.e., those experiencing flu-like symptoms or pneumonia) should see a doctor.

- If possi-

ble, plan activities that can be done indoors during freezing conditions or change the PT schedule to early afternoon when the temperatures are at its highest.

- Do not let Soldiers sleep in their cars while waiting for PT because of possible carbon

monoxide poisoning which can lead to death.

- Make sure Soldiers use a buddy system to keep watch for signs of trouble.

